

2023 URI GLOBAL PLASTIC FORUM / BUILDING CAPACITY

Building Partnerships for Action Working Groups

WORKING GROUP: FUTURE ROADMAP OF TEXTILES / SUMMARY (Notes Available Online)

The working group aimed to pool resources and plan initiatives to address the issue of microfiber pollution by breaking out into 4 groups to address a particular topic. After breakouts, each group shared their results with the entire group for discussion. We highlighted the importance of collaboration and shared opportunities for research, innovation, and convening. We included discussions on the state of knowledge for microfibers, challenges in researching and reducing microfibers across the supply chain, top research priorities, and strategies for reducing microfiber pollution. What became clear from the working group is that there are many global academic to industry experts, and there is a need for coordination of these resources to provide both short and long term solutions to address microfiber pollution.

Group 1: discussed the state of knowledge for microfibers, emphasizing the need for more awareness among consumers and regulations around labeling. They highlighted the wide range of products producing microfibers, and the ecological and human health impacts of microfibers and co-pollutants. The group also raised questions about the differences between microplastics and microfibers, and where natural and semi-synthetic microfibers stray from microplastics.

Group 2: focused on the challenges in researching and reducing microfibers. They identified the lack of legislation, consumer education, and overall behavior change as major obstacles. They suggested promoting natural textiles, reducing production of plastic textiles, and addressing the loss of microfibers in production and consumer stages.

Group 3: discussed top research priorities, including evaluating the tradeoffs between durability and degradability in textile materials, improving data on sources and quantities of microfibers, and exploring opportunities for innovation and large-scale filtering. They also highlighted the importance of environmentally realistic microfibers for testing biota and human health.

Group 4: discussed high-level strategies to reduce microfiber pollution. They emphasized the need to move the solution up the supply chain by prewashing textiles in factories, changing consumption models to prioritize durability and quality, implementing legislation such as Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), and educating consumers about the issue. They also stressed the global nature of the issue and the need for collaboration among various stakeholders.

Overall, the working group provided a platform for stakeholders from different backgrounds to discuss the challenges and opportunities related to microfiber pollution in the textile industry. The discussions highlighted the importance of research, innovation, legislation, and consumer education in addressing this critical issue.

As a recommended course of action, we proposed organizing additional convenings that encompass a wide range of stakeholders. This inclusive approach should involve key participants such as textile manufacturers, clothing brands, carpet producers, washing machine manufacturers, NGOs, and scientists. An upcoming opportunity to actively engage in this process is the upcoming convening hosted by 5 Gyres in Santa Barbara in March 2023, aimed at crafting a comprehensive microfiber roadmap. In preparation for this gathering, we are currently exploring the most effective organizational model. Subsequently, we suggest scheduling a URI convening in 2024, following the insights and outcomes generated. This convening will be part of the URI Plastics Seminar Series. This textile seminar takes place in February 2024.



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